

A Case Study of Demotivation

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Abstract

This study investigated demotivation at a private university in Saitama using first year English students as a case study, with two main foci: (i) the reasons (i.e., the demotives) underlying demotivation; (ii) the degree of influence on different demotives. Students were asked to answer a twelve question survey that focused on three constructs: the teacher, the class and the institution. The questionnaire used a five point Likert scale. The findings indicated that demotivation was a significant issue for students.

INTRODUCTION

Student demotivation is an area that has not been extensively researched and no specific framework has emerged from the studies done. Demotivation is concerned with the negative forces or demotives that influence students learning experience. Dornyei's (2001) defines demotivation as an external force that reduces or diminishes the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or as an ongoing action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first studies in demotivation were done in (L1) in the field of instructional communication by Gorham and Christophel (1992) in their survey of American college students in introductory communication classes. This study attempted to determine the factors students perceived as demotives. Students were asked to respond to the open-ended question: "What things decrease your motivation to try hard to do your best in class?" They found three main categories: context demotives (antecedent to the teachers' influence), structure/format (factors that teachers have some degree of influence), and teacher behaviour (factors perceived to be under the

teachers direct control). The two teacher-related factors accounted for 79% of the overall responses. Christophel and Gorham (1995) conducted a follow-up study to see if the results would be consistent with the results of the first study. Both studies were consistent with the same findings.

The first study to fully focus on demotivation in L2 was Chambers (1993). He investigated the reasoning behind students' decisions who dismantled L2 lessons. He visited four schools in Leeds (UK) and administered a questionnaire to 191 ninth-grade students enrolled in eight classes. Seven of the teachers involved in this study also answered a questionnaire. The teachers perceived the causes of demotivation to be related to psychological, attitudinal, social, historical, and geographical reasons, but they explicitly excluded themselves as possible reasons for their students' demotivation. The students' perceived reasons for demotivation were teachers' behaviour, class size, criticising students, etc. Unfortunately, Chambers did not attempt to determine what the demotives were or to look at them critically. Instead he simply listed the students' opinions. As a result, he could draw only from a few conclusions about the impact of demotives on the language learning experience.

Oxford's (1998) study used a content analysis of essays written by approximately 250 American high school and university students. It advanced the understanding of demotives by taking into account the factor of time. She believed that demotivation is a process that can be best understood by "looking back" to recall one's learning experiences over a period of time, in this case, five years. The students were asked to write a stimulated recall essay using a variety of prompts, like "Describe a situation in which you experienced conflict with a teacher." The findings revealed four broad sources of demotivation:

1. the teacher's personal relationship with the student.
2. the teacher's attitude toward the course or the material.
3. the style conflicts between teachers and students.
4. the nature of the classroom activities.

It should be noted that other potential sources might not have been provided by students since the prompts used by Oxford specifically referred to the role of the teacher.

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Ushioda (1998) interviewed 20 Irish learners of French and questioned them to identify what they found to be demotivating in their L2-related learning experiences without specifying any prompts. Her findings were not unlike the conclusions arrived at in previous studies. In other words, the demotives were related to negative aspects of the institutional learning context such as teaching methods and learning tasks. The results of this study only provided a general description as they formed only a part of a broader discussion on effective motivational thinking.

Dornyei's (1998) study differed from the previous three studies, in that the participants selected were all identified as demotivated learners. He hypothesized that only demotivated students, or those that experienced demotivation, can indicate the actual reasons that result in their loss of interest in language learning. The study was conducted by using long structured interviews of 50 secondary students in Budapest who were studying either English or German as a foreign language. His findings were consistent with the results reported in previous studies in that the largest category of demotives directly concerned the teacher. He identified the following 9 factors:

1. the teacher
2. inadequate school facilities
3. reduced self-confidence,
4. negative attitude towards the L2
5. compulsory nature of L2 study
6. interference of another foreign language being studied
7. negative attitude of group members L2 members
8. attitudes of group members
9. coursebook

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From my own experience I have observed that my first-year students consistently showed a marked decrease in their motivation after their first semester in a two-semester course. The rationale behind this study was to determine the possible underlying reasons for my students' demotivation and the range of their

demotivation. I gave my students the questionnaire at the beginning of their second semester. I instructed them to answer based on only their university learning experiences.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Students

All the participants in the study were students of my Comprehensive English I course. The class is co-ed and meets twice a week for the full year. The students are all first year English majors from a private university in Saitama. There were 20 participants with a TOEIC score range of 580 to 740. The respondents were all anonymous.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire consisted of 12 English questions divided between three constructs: the teacher, the course, and the institution. Four questions were developed for each construct and a 5 point Likert scale was used. The scale was the following 1 (not at all), 2 (not really), 3 (so-so), 4 (quite a lot), 5 (very much). The questionnaire was modified to suit the specific teaching context.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered at the end of the class. Before handing out the questionnaire, I explained the content and the scale to the students. In addition, clarified the meaning of each scale value and then read out each question and answered any possible misunderstandings. Students were free to ask questions before and during the survey. There was no incentive to participate in the survey for the students.

Results and Discussion

Teacher Construct

Among teacher-related factors, the teacher's energy level was the highest frequency in demotivating students at 70% , followed by the teachers' personality at 60%. This was followed by the teaching method at 45% and lastly the teachers preparedness at 20%. These findings indicate the teachers' energy level and personality were major demotive factors for students and are consistent with the

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other L2 studies' results. Contrary to my expectation, the teaching method/style was not the highest demotive factor in this construct. However, it did result in a significant level of demotive frequency and therefore needs a closer investigation to determine which specific teaching method/style students find the most demotivating.

Table 1
Teacher-Related Demotivating Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
The teaching method/style	0%	10%	45%	20%	25%
The teachers' personality	0%	15%	25%	35%	25%
The teachers' energy level	0%	10%	20%	45%	25%
The teachers preparedness	5%	15%	50%	5%	15%

Course Construct

Among course-related factors, classroom activities had the highest frequency in demotivating students at 40%, followed by course evaluation and students' behaviour at 30%, followed by the textbook at 15%. These results are considerably lower than the teacher related construct but do contain significant demotive frequencies. The results of the survey indicate that the lesson design process should include an awareness of the pedagogical impact classroom activities can have on students. Furthermore, the results show that teachers should be aware that the course evaluation has the potential to be a demotivating factor among students. Taking this into account, teachers should better explain how their students will be evaluated.

Table 2
ourse-Related Demotivating Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
The textbook	25%	20%	40%	10%	5%
Classroom activities	10%	20%	25%	15%	25%
The course evaluation	5%	10%	50%	15%	15%
Students behaviour	15%	10%	40%	15%	15%

Among institutional-related factors, the classroom and group size had the highest frequency in demotivating students at 35%, followed by the class period and

the number of students' assigned classes at 25%. The findings are quite similar to those found in the course- related construct.

I expected a much higher percentage of students to rate the number of their assigned classes as a demotive factor but that was not the case. First-year students have as high as nine assigned classes in total. In past years students have often complained of the high number of assigned classes with the same group of students.

The survey shows that the number of classrooms in which students' classes were held was significant in demotivating them. The classroom situation in this particular university can be explained by the fact that there is only one new building with modern classrooms. Universities should be aware of the significant demotive factors these areas have on students.

Table 3
Institutional-Related Demotivation Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
The classroom	20%	15%	30%	30%	0%
The class period	20%	10%	45%	15%	10%
The number of your assigned classes	15%	5%	5%	5%	20%
The group size	15%	10%	40%	25%	10%

Conclusion

The results found in the survey indicate that demotivation is a real problem confronting students and the need for further study is necessary to better understand this issue. It would be also beneficial get the teachers' perspective.

Thus, while there have been studies that have explored issues related to demotivation, no attempt has been made either to create a framework to aid in better understanding the phenomenon, nor to relate it to issues of curriculum design and teaching.

Although there are still others areas of student motivation that that need to be explored, I believe that the findings of the present research will not only widen the research that has already been done on demotivation but will also be of some use to teachers and learners.

References

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Appendix

MOTIVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer using the following scale:

Not at all Not really So-so Quite a lot Very much
1 2 3 4 5

1	How much is your motivation affected by the teaching method/style ?	1	2	3	4	5
2	How much is your motivation affected by the group size ?	1	2	3	4	5
3	How much is your motivation affected by the classroom activities?	1	2	3	4	5
4	How much is your motivation affected by the teachers' energy level?	1	2	3	4	5
5	How much is your motivation affected by the class period ?	1	2	3	4	5
6	How much is your motivation affected by the textbook?	1	2	3	4	5
7	How much is your motivation affected by the number of your assigned classes?	1	2	3	4	5
8	How much is your motivation affected by the course evaluation?	1	2	3	4	5
9	How much is your motivation affected by the teachers' personality	1	2	3	4	5
10	How much is your motivation affected by the classroom?	1	2	3	4	5
11	How much is your motivation affected by students' behaviour?	1	2	3	4	5
12	How much is your motivation affected by teachers' preparedness?	1	2	3	4	5

Toeic score: